Now followeth the Life of S. Katherine.

for presentation by children.

Out in the open desert of Sinai
lived many a scholastic eremyte,
who thought much, and burned with great devotion
for the holy virgin S. Katheryne.

By common assent they raised a chapel
in which this woman would be well-honoured.
They ordained the chapel near to the mount,
close to where the fire spoke to Moses.
And in this quiet place the holy hermits
lived in great abstinence and devotion,
and spent a glorious life in study.

To whom on a time an angel of God
appeared and said : "Rise up and follow me.
But though it be so that ye see me not,
yet the shadow of the palm that I bear
in hand shall never depart from your sight."

And so the hermits followed the angel
until they arrived at where no creature
might enter, for narrowness of the way,
and sharpness of the rocks, and the danger
of falling. Yet they ascended the steep
climb, surviving all that difficulty,
and there at the top they saw that the place
looked wholly shadowed by the leaves in the palm
of the hand of the angel, and they came
to the place where the body had lain
one hundred and thirty years in the stone.
And while all her flesh was dried away,

there was much left of Katheryne to see.

Her bones were lain as if she were sleeping.

She was on her side, hands under her head,

and looked as if she might still be dreaming.

*

Now followeth the Life of S. Katherine.

SCROOBY. I am Scrooby. I am here at the end.

All our sacred places are deserted,

and fallen to ruin. Yet since my love

for words remains, I'll tell you a story.

Hip to the question, *Why in the devil*

would I seek what is contrary to me?

—I'll do my best to tell this story well.

Fittingly, it starts with *best intentions*,

as you shall now hear. A long time ago,

back in the year of our lord two hundred,

there reigned in Alexandria a king

named Costus. And he was a right noble

and prudent man, a seemly man, and rich,

and of good conditions; and the queen his wife

was like to himself in noble governance;

and these two lived together prosperously,

and with great worldly fame (which pleased the king),

and their people loved and respected them;

but since no one on our earth is perfect,

the King and the Queen lived after the law
of hethens, and worshiped idols. They knelt
at the hearthfire and prayed to dumb stones;
and in doing this they thought themselves wise.
So as the fair rose springeth in the briars
and thorns, right so between these two hethens
was brought forth the blessed S. Katheryne.
¶ And when she was born she was so lovely
in face and so well-formed in body
that all the people enjoyed her beauty.
¶ When Katherine was seven years of age
she was sent to school, where she profited
much more than any other of her friends,
reading deeply into the sciences and art.
The king Costus her father was so pleased
with his daughter and her great eagerness
for wisdom that he ordained a tower
in his palace solely for her studies,
with diverse libraries and chambers
where she might sit at her pleasure and will.
And he also ordained to have brought to her
seven of the best and wisest teachers
of wisdom that might be had in those parts.
But within a while that they had come,
they were so charmed with her method of mind
they became her students, and learned of her.
¶ Then when good Katherine came to the age

of fourteen years, the king her father died.
She was left as queen and heir after him.
Then all the territories of the land
desired to convene a parliament,
in which the young woman might be crowned
and receive the homage of her subjects;
and that such a seemly rule might be set
in her beginning, that prosperity
might ensue in her realm for all the days
of her reign. And Katheryne granted them
their asking. And when the parliament
was assembled, the young queen was crowned
with great solemnity, with her mother
by her, and all the lords were in their place;
then one arose to his feet, and he said :

LORD. Highest and mighty princess Katheryne,
our most sovereign lady, our example
of all things decent in mind and in heart,
may it please you to know that I am led
by the queen your mother, by all the lords
and commons of this your realm, to advise
your highness, that it may please you to grant
to them the chance to present some noble
gentleman to marry you, to the end
that he rule with you, and defend your realm
and subjects, like your father before you;

and also that you may proceed a noble
lineage, which, after you, will guide us,
and reign upon the throne where you now sit.
Now I have spoken what we most desire;
and hereof we solicit your good answer.

KATHERYNE. Dear cousin, I have well understood your request,
and I thank my mother, the lords, and my subjects
for the great love that they have for me and our realm.
But as for the marriage that you request of me,
I am sure there will be no peril in any case,
when we consider the wisdom of my mother,
and of the lords, and the good faith of the commons.
Therefore we need not seek a stranger to rule us.
As for the present, with your good assistance we hope
to rule, govern, and keep our realm in good justice,
peace, and rest, in like wise as the king my father
held you in. So I ask you, be content and cease
of this matter, and let us turn to such matters
requisite for the rule, governance, happiness,
and universal power of this our sole realm.

SCROOBY. When the queen her mother and all the lords
had heard her answer, they were much troubled
and knew not what to say, for they had heard
her say that she had no will to be married.
Then her uncle stood up, who was a duke,

and with due reverence began to speak.

DUKE. My sovereign lady, we praise your high
and noble discretion; yet your answer
is heavy to my lady your mother,
and to all of us, your humble subjects;
so I beg of you to hear my advice.
Please allow me to speak to your highness
of four notable things. These particulars
Nature has given you, beyond all creatures
that we know; and these things should persuade you
to take a husband, to the end that the gifts
of Nature may spring by your generation
down by the right line to reign upon us,
to the great comfort of all your people;
but the contrary, should turn us to sorrow.

KATHERYNE. Good uncle, what then be these four notable things
that you so repute in me?

DUKE. Madame, the first is that we know that you
come of the most noble blood in the world.
The second, that you have inherited
all that is best is us; to our knowledge,
you are now the greatest woman alive.
The third, that you pass in education
everyone we know of, in science, teaching,

and wisdom. The fourth, of all the women,
you are the most beautiful we have ever seen.
Madame, these are the four notable things
which may incline you to hear our request.

KATHERYNE. Uncle, since Nature has worked so great virtues in me,
I should be much more bound to love and to please her;
so herewith I thank Nature humbly for her gifts.
But since you desire so much that I be married,
I let you describe to me all that you spoke of.
Now to you I shall describe the husband I desire,
a husband who shall have in him four notable things,
and if you can find such a one, then Katheryne
will agree to marry him with all of our heart.
He shall be such that all creatures have need of him,
so rich that he passes all others in riches;
and of such nobility that all worship him,
so that he shall never think I made him a king;
and so full of beauty that all people have joy
to see him, so pure all think his mother a virgin;
and so benign in his way that he can gladly
forgive all offences done to him, and be kind.
Now I have described to you him whom I will have
as husband. Go and seek him. If you can find one
like him, I will be his wife, if he will have me.
But if you do not find him, I will never marry,
and you must take this as my final answer.

SCROOBY. Understandably the lords were disturbed at this.

MOTHER. Daughter, is all of this your great wisdom?
You do me much sorrow, and all of us.
Whoever heard of such a husband you seek?
For what you describe, there was never none,
nor ever shall be; so leave your folly
and do as all those have done before you.

KATHERYNE. I believe there is one even better
than I can devise him; and by his grace
he might find me, or I shall never know joy.
I won't be moved, Mother, so speak no more
of this. I shall have no other husband
but only him whom I have described,
to him will I give all the love of my heart,
and to none other.

SCROOBY. That was that. Her mother and all the lords
of the parliament departed, with sorrow
and lamentation. But queen Katheryne
was excited. Her heart was set afire
on this husband that she had devised;
and though she could do nothing but dream
how she might find him, she felt a burning
love for him, which would never after be

cooled, regardless of pain or tribulation.

Now I shall leave this young queen in contemplation.

*

SCROOBY. A spell of miles out of the city

of Alexandria lived a hermit

in the desert named Adrian, who spent

thirty years of his life off on his own

in a cave, where he prayed, and studied

our king of kings with great concentration.

(This king Katheryne was yet to know of.)

Father Adrian devoted all his heart

to God, though none saw, or heard, or cared for

the fruits of his learning, yet from the first

he knew that something would justify his faith.

So it happened, that after all those years

of persistence, something wonderful

was revealed to him. Someone is coming,

to speak the reason for his lonely work,

and justify all the years off on his own.

Hear now how this agèd man is reborn

with youthful vigour through revelation

of the divine. My friends, let's listen in.

ADRIAN. Ah, Dawn! You give me a new day to pray,

and study, and cultivate my heart and mind,

and if I may not deserve this (who knows?),

I'm still here. Now I lower to my knees,
and I thank you for this new day of life,
another chance to make myself better.
Ah God, if only you would show yourself
to me! I have woken to this question
for thirty years—indeed, for all the days
of my life. Yet you keep your face from me
still, after all this time. Perhaps today
you will come and reveal yourself to me?
Even with all of my errors and faults,
have I not show myself worthy of love?
¶ Well then. After breakfast I will hit the books.

SCROOBY. Then the round opening of the cave filled
with light. It poured in like raging water,
and all this light became an atmosphere
for him to breathe and live in; and the man
was pleased to have a table in his cave,
as it allowed him to hide under it,
as you see; and he said :

ADRIAN. Ah, God! Please do *not* show yourself to me!

SCROOBY. Adrian now experienced common
reactions to fear and terror; his breath
caught in his throat, and he could hardly move.
Some things human eyes were not meant to see.
Then he looked, and along with the terror,

he was filled with awe. And he took himself
out from under the table, and stood up;
while the light coming at him was intense,
and hot, and kept getting hotter and hotter
during the visitation till he thought
all his skin might burn away from his bones.

ADRIAN. (*I stand in the light of faith, surrounded by night; alone, yet free.*) Speak, if you will,
whether you come here sent by God, or maybe
you've come on a desire of your own.
I kneel before you now in all reverence.
There is nothing about you that is not
holy and beautiful—

SCROOBY. But then he took a second look, this holy man.
He gazed into the light, and shook again with terror.
What did he see? The radiance that came to him,
it came as a round corridor woven of colours,
at the other end of which, stood Mary.
She looked to him to be eternally distant,
though she stood right there in the doorway of his cave;
and the distance between them could not be measured.

ADRIAN. Lady, we are sad, and this world is sick.
Will you give us a cure for our disaster?
Please, all-knowing one, teach us, for you know;

why must we suffer our way into Heaven?

MARY. The way to Heaven is punishment.

ADRIAN. Why?

MARY. Humans suffer their progress to heaven
because humans on earth would have it so.

ADRIAN. But what is a short spell of suffering
compared to life everlasting in Heaven?

MARY. Yes.

SCROOBY. So the pious are beaten into the light,
is what Mary has reinforced for us. Those who know
this already, my sympathies. And Katheryne?
The girl has no idea what she is about to face.

*

SCROOBY. Look! We have come into open desert.
My friends, do you feel as Adrian does?
There is nothing that is not an effort
for him now, at his age, in this climate.
In the heat the old man's heart is desolate,
for there is nothing at all here to see,
nothing that blossoms, or might inspire.

The old man steps along the stones barefoot.
He knows what he needs, where he needs to be;
but he has no idea how to get there,
and that is a terrible pain to feel.

ADRIAN. Alexandria, Alexandria!
What do I know of Alexandria?

SCROOBY. Having spent thirty years off on his own,
Adrian has audible conversations
with himself; and just now he sounds upset.

ADRIAN. Walk, walk, she tells me to walk. Thirty years
of prayer yet I still get no explanation.
She just tells me to walk. “Just walk,” she says,
“and you’ll find your way to where you’re going.”
Well, I’m walking and all I see is desert.
“Don’t stop,” she says. Have I not been in prayer
for thirty years? I know how to keep it up.
Now I’m nowhere with no idea. Ah, well.
Once upon a time, Earth was a paradise.

SCROOBY. The man has never sounded so upset.
So discouraged, so lost. What can I do?
I’d tell him not to give up, but let’s wait
and see what happens.

ADRIAN. And if I do find
Alexandria? and pass through the gates?
and even find the palace where the queen
is, the girl Katheryne who rules the city?
Just how am I to get inside the palace?
“Walk in,” Mary says. Great idea. “Walk in.”
But how am I supposed to know my way
around? She says I’ll know, and find the girl.
“Walk in.” Enough! Who am I to argue?
But I’m ignoring the thorniest problem
of all—how in the world am I supposed
to get Queen Katheryne to come with me?
And what would Mary want with this hethen?
And what is it that makes me so special,
to be the guide to bring the girl to her?
How I’m to do this without getting dead
I do not know.

SCROOBY. Hey, I’m glad I waited.

ADRIAN. Alexandria. There it is. Well then,
old friend, you just learned something essential.
Even a lifetime of prayer is not
enough to prepare yourself for the shock
of the Call. But just hold on; it’s not over
yet—I might be walking into my grave.

SCROOBY. So he comes to the gates of the city,
and goes right in. It seems the guards just then
were playing a game of dice—

GUARDS. Triple sixes!

SCROOBY. —and did not see. So yes, good Adrian
passes through the gates without incident;
no one sees him go.

ADRIAN. Well, then; keep going.

SCROOBY. He kept going, this agèd man, walking
the streets of the big city; and he came
to the palace, just like that, and walked in.
May no one even whisper, and no eyes
see, or a hundred swords will pierce his heart.

ADRIAN. If anyone hears or sees me I'm dead.
Be with me now, good lady. Show me the way.

SCROOBY. (I'm feeling some anxiety; are you?
My palms are wet.) He walked down many halls—

ADRIAN. Whoever saw so many hallways?

SCROOBY. —and
he went through many galleries, many chambers,
and he passed by many open doors of rooms
with many a guard, and lookouts, and watchers,
and protectors, who all stood guard over
the queen, and were sworn to defend her life.
They were more fanged than wolves or bears; but it
was as the Lady said : no one saw him
as he went along.

ADRIAN. I'll go up these stairs.

SCROOBY. And he came to a room and there she was,
Katheryne. Fourteen years old, but strong, a leader.
She was in her private chamber atop
the highest tower, and surrounded by books.
The old man entered the room and found her
in holy contemplation. And she filled him
with amaze, for she was the most beautiful
creature he had ever seen. She left him
speechless, just at the time when he should talk.

ADRIAN. (*What I know is not enough; what is in my heart will save me. Grace, be with me now.*)

SCROOBY. The first thing that happened was, she looked up
and saw him, and their eyes met. So now what?
She could welcome him, she could destroy him.

*

KATHERYNE. Rise from your knees.
ADRIAN. Most noble queen, I cannot.
KATHERYNE. Why not?
ADRIAN. I have come far, my lady, and I am weary.
KATHERYNE. You have come far to see me?
ADRIAN. Yes.
KATHERYNE. What is your name?
ADRIAN. Adrian.
KATHERYNE. What would you have with me, Adrian?

ADRIAN. I would have you come with me.

KATHERYNE. Who are you?

ADRIAN. I live in the desert. I study, and I pray.

KATHERYNE. What is it that you study?

ADRIAN. God, to whom I pray.

KATHERYNE. What god is that?

ADRIAN. The one true god.

KATHERYNE. You come here to take me from my idols?

ADRIAN. I come to wed you to your one true god.

KATHERYNE. Wed me?

ADRIAN. Yes, my lady.

KATHERYNE. Who is this god you speak of who is to be my husband?

ADRIAN. He is such that all creatures have need of him, so rich that he passes all others in riches, and is kind.

KATHERYNE. All these words of yours are well said.

ADRIAN. The one true god is the sole monarch of the universe.

KATHERYNE. How do you speak my words back to me as you do?

ADRIAN. This is what I know, my lady—the excellence of your beauty befits one only, the most beautiful god of all.

KATHERYNE. The husband you describe would indeed be the ideal guardian of my heart, and to him I would give myself wholly. But what I want to know, Adrian, is this—Speak to me, of his lineage.

ADRIAN. Himself.

KATHERYNE. He is himself his own father?

ADRIAN. Your understanding is most swift, my lady.

KATHERYNE. What is his name?

ADRIAN. Yeshua.

KATHERYNE. And what does that name mean?

ADRIAN. It means to deliver your body and soul to paradise.

KATHERYNE. Well, sir, I shall rise from my books, and have the honour of your escort, to the hand of my husband.

ADRIAN. Yes, my lady.

SCROOBY. It was as easy as that.

*

SCROOBY. Katheryne put her hand into the old man's hand,
and Adrian's heart fluttered in his chest at that,
for long since he had forgotten the touch of love.
The girl's affection brought back to him the feeling
of his dear mother, and tears streamed down his face,
for he'd lost much in life. But if he could do this,
accomplish the task that Mary had asked of him,
he might see her again, in Heaven, as reward
for good service; and he wanted to see her again.
So he let Katheryne take the lead. She had wrapped
a shawl round her head to disguise her appearance;
and holding his life in her hands she led him down
the hallways of the palace. Then at the peril
of the city gates she got them through trickily,
and entered into desert. It was a burning
and barren place, with nothing and no one to see,
a terrible stretch of desolation.
But Katheryne kept her tender fingers twined in his,
and set her pace to match the measured step of his,
while her robes trailed in the dust, and he went
barefoot on stone. And as they went, the holy man
lost his way, and knew not where he was, and became
confused in himself. Then he dropped to his knees
and began to pray under his breath, and he said :

ADRIAN. *Alas! I fear I am deceived; and that all this*
be illusion. Alas! Shall this virgin here, tonight,

perish among the wild beasts that roam this place?

Help me, blessed lady, now, for I am almost

in despair. Will you save this girl that has given

up everything for your love, and has obeyed you?

SCROOBY. And as he thus sorrowed, the blessèd Katheryne

perceived his suffering. Now imagine the pathos, my friends,

of a girl, fourteen years old, comforting an old man.

Watch her slip a benevolent arm round his shoulders.

KATHERYNE. Why are you troubling, Adrian?

ADRIAN. For you, because I cannot find my cell. I don't know where I am.

KATHERYNE. Good sir, your god is kind. If he brought you to me, it stands to reason he wouldn't allow us to suffer in this desert.

ADRIAN. Let us continue.

KATHERYNE. What is that up ahead? Shining back the sun more brilliant than the sun?

ADRIAN. What is it you see, my lady?

KATHERYNE. Yonder in the east.

SCROOBY. Then, as it says in the book, Adrian wiped his eyes, and he saw the most glorious monastery that ever he saw, whereof he was full of joy, and he said to her, *Now blessed be God that hath endowed you with so perfect faith, for there is that place wherein ye shall receive so great worship and joy, that there was never none like, save only our blessed Lady. ¶ Now, good Father Adrian, said Katheryne, hie you fast that we were there, for there is all my desire and joy.*

ADRIAN. No. You go on ahead alone, my lady.

SCROOBY. So she went, and the old man waited.

*

In the shadow of the palm on the peak
of the hill, the hermits uncovered the bones
of Katheryne, glowing a brilliant white
in the sun. They took them up with great joy,
and brought them back to the chapel that they
had made in her honour; and this was done
by great miracle, for the place where she lay
was so steep and narrow and dangerous
that it seemed impossible to reason
that the hermits had made it there at all.
And for long after this chapel was honoured,
and our Lord showed there many miracles,
for out of her bones flowed a clear white oil,
by which many maladies might be cured.

*

SCROOBY. Four years later, in the time of the rule
of the impious emperor Maxentius,
the entire Roman empire worshiped
a hateful cult of demons. Meanwhile
good Queen Katheryne was eighteen years old.
All her good gifts of youth had blossomèd
into a beautiful young womanhood.
She was kind, and blessed with many graces;
and was well-belovèd of all her people.
Can you scent her vernal fragrance on the air?
See her now at pious study, high in her tower,
considering the Holy Scriptures
in the ancient tongues. It was said this girl

read all the words readable in the world;
the bounty of books brought her enormous bliss.

ROMANS. And sitting on his high and lofty throne
our emperor Maxentius issued
a mighty law to the people, insisting
that all persons respecting his power
and dominion should pray to the true gods,
and make sacrifice to idols. The good
Maxentius sent notice of his law
throughout all the empire, and the letters
he sent were worded in the following way.

HERALD. From the great emperor Maxentius :
To all who are in our domain, salutem!
We have been given a great benefit
from the benevolent gods. To reward
this generosity, we think it proper
to offer sacrifices. In doing this,
all people among us shall show favour
to the great gods. Those who hold this decree
in scorn, and look to another religion
forbidden by us, they will be cut off
from the generosity of the gods,
and subject by us to extreme punishment.

SCROOBY. When this letter had spread to every part
of the empire, the people flocked together
in multitudes, in terror of his threats;
and many indeed brought with them their sheep
and cattle, and different types of birds.

ROMANS. No one ignored the call, but all were united
in preparing the sacrifice. It was arranged
that the very wealthy would bring the largest
animals with them; while the poor brought
smaller beasts. Each would make do according
to the means available to each. Maxentius himself
encouraged his people in magnificent style,
once by bringing to sacrifice one hundred and thirty bulls.

SCROOBY. That was the time he came to Alexandria.

ROMANS. Maxentius was very pleased to see
the multitude of people in sacrifice
in the temple of Alexandria.
With him had come every race, every age,
and the whole senate, and all the magistrates,
and all the great multitude of citizens;
each person bringing with them what they thought
suitable for sacrifice.

SCROOBY. The multitude
of those who flocked together was so great
that the city was jammed, and the temple
was jammed, and the whole county round echoed
with the cries of beasts; and an odour
filled the air of burning sacrifices.
It was enough to make your stomach turn.

KATHERYNE. I hear the harps and flutes of sacrifice.
Dear creatures, I sorrow, for your blood is mine, too.

What misery to feel freedom stolen
by foolish power for foolish ideas;
and so much sweet tenderness is wasted.
My people willingly follow, for fear
of themselves being next to fall; no one
would cross purposes with tyrannous Rome.
And in all this they see how it is with them.
How people treat their animals is how
they treat each other. Ah, feel my heartbreak!
Katheryne, you must rise now from your studies,
and follow the sweet scent of dreadful death
down to the temple, and put a stop to this
terrible butchery of innocents.

SCROOBY. And so it was and would be for the girl.
If only my words could reach you, Katheryne,
I'd say, enjoy a few more minutes' peace.
But no, you cannot see me nor hear me.

SATAN'S SONG. *Across, up, down, our fortunes go,*
like whirlings of feathery snow,
never so certain or so sound
as when they're fallen to the ground.

SCROOBY. So moved the fate of Alexandrian
Katheryne toward the martyrdom she suffered.

*

THE PEOPLE. She comes! Like the lofty cypress bearing
the morning dew, she excels all women.

Or like a palm tree that adorns above
all other trees. Noble queen, do you hear
the deplorable sound of the cattle
whining in sorrow? As we have faith, we weep.

SCROOBY. It was necessary for her to see
for herself the errors of Maxentius
and his deception, and then to attempt
to cast off his devotion to demons.

KATHERYNE. Destruction falls on all those devoted
to demons. The wise do not look at soulless
things and call them gods. This does not help
those who live amid struggle, and who end
their lives with pity.

SCROOBY. The gatekeepers reported her coming
to the emperor, who ordered good Queen
Katheryne to come and stand before him.

KATHERYNE. Greetings to you, emperor, and the dignity
of the people of the empire you promote.
Emperor, just now you are blessed with a flowering
fragrance, already now perceptible to you,
already now ready to receive you into
the sweetness of its universe that surrounds us.
Already now the spirit of the holy angel
breathes its tender fragrance through me; and the gateway
is open, the gateway to the kingdom beyond
your kingdom. Emperor Maxentius, you should say,
“I will enter, so I may know what is to be done.”

EMPEROR. You don’t bend the knee at the dignity
of the illustrious presence before you?

KATHERYNE. The purpose of my mind has been clearly declared.
Your tyranny is not healthy to mind or soul.
You, sir, are a rational creature, yet worship
insensible stones. You transfer the honour
of the invisible majesty to visible things.
Human error is in no way more destructive
than this—the loss of your soul. We who follow truth
never sacrifice harmless animals to God.

EMPEROR. I hear your palace is magnificent,
full of taste and an abundance of wealth;
your ministers are wise, your servants trusty,
and you have all that anyone would admire.
Now, as to what you have just said to me,
though you be guilty of treason, I have
no wish to harm you. You will not even
have to solicit my forgiveness. Why,
you ask? Because no woman has ever
stood before me as you do. Your beauty
shines in you like a mirror of the sun.
Your eyes bring peace of every part of me.
But you will need to change the disposition
of your thinking. As for those robes you wear,
they are far too plain to be worn before us.

KATHERYNE. Alas, that such a great and noble multitude
of people should not lower their heads in disgrace

to follow such sin as you do.

EMPEROR. Dear girl,
your deliberate errors shall be your great pain.

KATHERYNE. You may have my mortal living body;
I give you all the dignity due to you.

EMPEROR. Inform me what is on your mind.

KATHERYNE. Triumph.

EMPEROR. You call passionate torments a victory?

KATHERYNE. You will send me into the arms of my husband.

EMPEROR. I understand nothing of what you say.
So much beauty in such a mysterious thing!
On this holiday of honourable sacrifice,
you have obtained my gracious benevolence.
As I am infinite in power and goodness,
I will listen to what you wish to say to me.
Explain yourself—but take care, I will not be deceived.
I see things more clearly than others do.
You wish our sacred deities to be empty
of honour? Katheryne, the worship of our gods
was handed down to us in ancient times by wise
and well-remembered persons, whose judgments
as proven truth are so solidified as fact
that no further arguments from any new author
are required to explain our planet

and its gods. As sure as you speak here before me,
you will realise yourself inferior in doctrine.

KATHERYNE. God is generous in all things, but He waits for
each person's own good purpose to show itself.
If you have the body here, but not have the mind,
your life profits you nothing. I tell you the door
is open. The spirit will receive you,
and you may enter, forevermore dead to sin,
but alive to righteousness, from this way forward,
and your eyes won't be occupied with useless things.
You shall know that God has called, and you have been called.

SCROOBY. The learnèd woman was only getting started.

KATHERYNE. How beautiful, for at least one wise man
among you to want to know the truth of the gods
you follow. And the wise do not wish to do things
that are not proper. The wise will not look upon
a stone and call it a god. And do you marvel
at this temple, that has been made with human hands?
Your idols, too, have been made with the workman's thumb;
they are deaf and dumb and have no understanding.
The idols you call your gods are made of the dust
of the earth. Your idols are inferior and cheap
and have nothing immortal about them.
Yet you worship these things and ornaments,
that are dust before the wind? Rather you should look
to the sky, to the open space of celestial
bodies, and ask yourself of these things, and of how
they came to be; for everything exposed by sight

has been here since the beginning of the world,
and shall exist for as long as it shall please God.
When you have knowledge of all these things around us,
then you shall know what is sovereign over us.

EMPEROR. If it be as you say, that all the earth
is wrong, and only you speak truth, then your
every word ought to be confirmed by the word
of two or three witnesses.

KATHERYNE. Put aside
your deception, and you will see for yourself
the one true god who is immortal and eternal.
Do not believe in that which you should not believe,
and recognise as the true god the one god alone
who has given you your life itself, and can give
you eternal life, if you keep the faith, observe
as salvation demands; and you will be delighted.

EMPEROR. Who has ever seen or heard of a multitude
of people being driven from the sacred services
of the immortal gods by a single young girl?
The god you speak of keeps so far from human sight,
he remains in so remote a region of sky,
in so obscure a corner of our world, that he stays
unknown to us, and perhaps does not exist at all.
Should not a great god show himself? Why so secret?
He whom you describe is a barbaric god
for a rough people. You invite my eyes
up to the sky—but the idols we serve
are renderings of two great gods, the Sun and Moon.

Who is among us who would dare not show honour
to these immortal divinities of the air?

KATHERYNE. And in this, emperor, you are in grave error.
Please, sir, consider the courses of the sun and moon.
On each day, due to the vicissitudes of time,
the sun loses its day with the coming of night
and the moon, whom, however, the sun does not always
illuminate; or the moon high in the clouds
is blocked out, and it suffers its own loss of light.
Do you hear? Both sun and moon were first put into
motion by the Creator, and have no free will
of their own. The sun does not decide how much light
to give off, nor does the moon decide in how much
sunlight to reflect off its face. It is the Creator
who put the sun and moon onto their ordered paths.
Why serve gods who are held in thrall to another?
Why not serve the strength and wisdom of the Master?
Consider various falling stars in the same way;
and also the approach and retreat of the sea.
And also this, wise Emperor : The face
of the sea is alternately at rest in calm
weather, or worked up during storms. The earth, infused
with rain, becomes soft. Water is either condensed
by heat, or hardened by frost. All of these movements
are subject to the original government
of the one true god, who gave everything being,
and set everything in motion, and can stop it.
The faithful tremble at the thought of God.
And it is not as you say. He does not hide.
Everything visible is a vision of God.

Observe, then, Maxentius, how all the elements
on earth and beyond, in combination or alone,
serve the reason of established order,
whose sole monarch is the one true god.
All things that you adore were made by God.
You have not understood, till now, how much insult
you inflict on Him. Unless you are converted,
you will suffer eternal damnation.

EMPEROR. Is this the truth?

KATHERYNE. That is the truth. Emperor
Maxentius, you must stop preaching as you do;
for all your words are of no use whatsoever,
and are incapable of proof by any reason.
Your cults of demons are in no way profitable,
but in every way harmful. It is much wiser
to study the eternal things, and keep them forever.
If you do not know, it is better to ask a question,
and listen and learn from those who do know.

EMPEROR. It is evident that I listen to no giggly girl.

SCROOBY. She certainly makes an impression on a man.
Her beauty was such that the emperor
could stare into her tenderness forever.

KATHERYNE. Your idols, sir, are demons from the devil.
You are led by him to believe that the elements
of the world have a free will that they do not have.
God himself allows the perpetuity of things.

SCROOBY. Listen as Katheryne goes on a wondrous offensive.

KATHERYNE. Emperor, if anyone in your empire
were to confer the honour due to you
on another, would you not judge them guilty
of high treason? Therefore, give up your devotion
to soulless and lifeless things, which all the people
mistakenly follow, and recognise your true king.
Praise the patience of God that you have not been punished.

EMPEROR. These things you speak would be as beautiful
as you are, dear girl, if only they were confirmed
by reason, and supported on that foundation
for all to see; but your god allows us to be fooled.
He watches us pray to our insensible things?
It is a cruel god who does not help us in need.
You would have us believe that a dead criminal
regained his spirit after three days, and rose
from his tomb? After long crucifixion?
What you believe is credible to no wise man.
None. Katheryne, what nation is there so barbarous
that it does not honour the great gods sun and moon?

KATHERYNE. You remain in error. It is clear you wrongly
give the name of divinity to simple objects.
It is God who created the elements
that have manufactured all these objects.
God made the sun, the moon, and the dust of the earth.

SCROOBY. During this conversation she cited against him

all the best authorities of his ancient past,
such as Homer and Aristotle, and the acts
of the mythical gods; but for brevity's sake
you will hear none of that.

EMPEROR. Good Katheryne,
It is obvious that you are inferior
to very few in learning; yet if you had learned
in our gymnasia, you would not be so wrong
in your conclusions.

KATHERYNE. No; I have wisdom.
It was given to me as a gift from my god,
who is wisdom and life everlasting.
But the affairs of your gods are ridiculous,
and have given me nothing.

EMPEROR. So you say.
You are highly knowledgeable, so much
is certain, but have you learned how to hurl
stones at your enemies, and do battle?
Now I must have you taken into prison.

KATHERYNE. Do as you will. I wear the armour of my faith.

SCROOBY. Thus began the passion of the holy virgin Katheryne.

KATHERYNE. Ready is the sword of my spirit.

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NICKY. How goes everything, Katheryne?

KATHERYNE. All goes according to the will of God.

NICKY. Does that mean you have to like all of it?

KATHERYNE. No; I understand the blessing of God
demands I endure an effort of pain.
The reward is worth that short time of pain.

NICKY. Maybe not so short. Have any regrets?

KATHERYNE. I regret nothing
that has ever come to pass in my life;
for through all that I've come to save my soul.

NICKY. Through the gift of education from your
loving parents you are now in prison,
and you celebrate the situation?

KATHERYNE. I never said I celebrate my fate
here on earth; but it shall lead me to bliss.

NICKY. Your husband! Why doesn't he help you now?

KATHERYNE. As you well know, the story still unfolds.

NICKY. What can happen next, do you think? Torture?

KATHERYNE. Please will you go away? Leave me alone.

NICKY. Have I upset you?

KATHERYNE. No; I wish to study,
and you interrupt my concentration.

NICKY. Studying, but you are about to die!

KATHERYNE. Why do you speak so ridiculously?
You won't lure me into foolishness.
Why would you want to do that anyway?

NICKY. Because your dumb piety sickens me.
You seem so certain there's an afterlife.

KATHERYNE. You're here, aren't you?

NICKY. I am.

KATHERYNE. So I'm certain.

NICKY. I laugh at your wisdom, in a good way.

KATHERYNE. Why hurt me, when Rome prepares to do it?

NICKY. I hear you. Lifting a finger these days
only makes me feel dirty afterwards.
But here's a secret for you, my young thing.
Someone as surpassingly beautiful as yourself,
no matter what I do, I won't feel dirty.
I'll go away embraced in your fragrance,
that is so sweet to taste.

KATHERYNE. Goodbye.

NICKY. Now that is rude of you, Katheryne.

KATHERYNE. Casting out devils is never polite.

NICKY. You sure I can't tempt you to a little more thought?

KATHERYNE. I am firm in my purpose; which doesn't mean
I have to be happy to be in here.

NICKY. Why not just end it for yourself right now?

KATHERYNE. I already explained to you the story
is not over. I do not know if you are
simply tricky, or surprisingly slow,
at least with me.

NICKY. I'll go. Go on, study.

KATHERYNE. What an inconvenience of an angel.

SATAN'S SONG. *Across, up, down, our fortunes go,*
like whirlings of feathery snow,
never so certain or so sound
as when they're fallen to the ground.

KATHERYNE. Unhappy girl! What will become of you
here? Will you suffer the teeth of the fire?
Their delay is doing me harm, it seems;
may it soon be over. Why did I not
just stay at home, and read my precious books?

Will they carve my flesh? What worse can they do?
Rome is a pit of mud that sticks to me.
They do filthy work, their words are dusty.
Open, O Earth, and plunge them into hell!
Only hell will tolerate them. But hear!
Katheryne, I, will go to Paradise!
You are not so low that you cannot rise again!
And all those who come later and hear my story,
may they learn of all that is right and pray for me,
and thereby put their own souls into Paradise.
There they will see my body, and its so much life,
and we will live in saecula saeculorum—
SATAN'S SONG. —*never so certain or so sound*—
KATHERYNE. —*forever and ever and ever*.

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HERALD. From the great emperor Maxentius :
To all who are in our domain, salutem!
All philosophers and rhetoricians,
all historians and grammarians,
come to us at once; for a young woman
full of accumulation of knowledge
has proposed to us such obscure discourse
that we cannot resist it ourselves. But
if you can resist this same woman,
and overcome her with your reasoning,
I will honour you all with no small gifts.

EMPEROR. Welcome! You have come from diverse places,
fifty masters who excel all mortal men

in wisdom. You are chief of the highest
orators and schoolmasters and scholars,
and are celebrated throughout our realm
for your thoughts on all kinds of deep knowledge.
There has come to us a young girl, a rude girl,
very beautiful, but a silly girl.
She demands we renounce our sacred gods,
to deny our household gods whom we adore,
and bend to what she calls the one true god.
A most terrible ill-will towards our world
afflicts her, though the girl should be living
cheerfully, for she enjoys all the charms
of wealth. But, no, the girl must tear us down,
and listen to our groans and grovelling.
She speaks gibberish, but she says it well,
and she puts me in two minds so that
I do not know which way to place my thoughts.
It is lovely to hear, her gibberish,
for her voice is musical; her words come
from such a face of surpassing beauty,
such a comportment of nobility,
(her graces are as many as her words),
that I found it grievous not to listen;
and that can bring nothing good to me.
She has left me dejected and pensive,
and I am very sorry about it.
I want to regain my goodness at heart.
You must crush this Katheryne in debate!
You must expose her errors, one by one;
then I shall sleep easy again. Beware,
though; she has innumerous premises

to argue her position. But as persuasive
as she sounds to me, she cannot be right.
So question her and reveal her errors!
Humiliate her! Let her plead her case,
lead her down that garden path, then crush her.
To lose to her would be a shame to you.
Be my men, and I will reward you richly.
Go now and hear what she says; and restore
the honour of our gods.

SCHOLARS. We go to do
everything that pleases you without delay.

SCROOBY. And so the great disputation took place,
the young Katheryne of Alexandria
matching her quick wits against the best men
in the empire, a team of fifty.
And then a messenger came to the throne.#

MESSENGER. Benevolent emperor, I am here
to tell you the outcome of the disputation.
In the girl's reasoning the schoolmasters
found nothing to despise. They concluded
that they see in her a heavenly spirit;
they say that they dare not speak against her.
Now they are down on their knees before her,
all fifty, and are receiving baptism.

EMPEROR. What? May the devils have a part of it!
Have a fire kindled in the middle of
the city, and throw in all fifty men.

SCHOLARS. Alas! We are led to our destruction!
Bound hand and foot, before all the people
we shall die by fire! A fair turn, this!
We must give our lives for the one true god!

KATHERYNE. Have no fear. You have been chosen champion.

SCROOBY. And it was said that the holy virgin
comforted them, and soothed them of all doubt.
While she spoke, they were tossed into the flames.
It was seen that inside the fire they lifted
their hands to Heaven, and went with joy from this world.
This turned many townspeople to the faith;
they, too, wanted to be crowned in Heaven.
So Katheryne was thrown back in prison.
She was stripped naked, and it was ordered she be
tormented by hunger for the space of twelve days.

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SCROOBY. Now an opportunity opened up
for an entrepreneur with quick thinking
to gain success and notoriety;
there was a magistrate of the city
by the name of Chursates, and he had
a bright idea, through which he might gain
the love of the emperor, and rise in rank.
He went down into his storehouse, and took
into his hands a large lump of iron,
that had been broken off a colossal

pile of iron that had served the people
for generations. The tale of this iron
should be told here, as it helps to explain
the man's motivations, which led to terror.
When the man was a boy, a ball of fire
was observed in the sky for a hundred days;
it flared incandescent for a few seconds
then fell to earth before the boy's own eyes.
It was a four-thousand-pound mass of iron,
and its appearance was subsequently
celebrated on newly-minted coins.
Still, no one knew precisely what to think
of it. Was it a solid thunderbolt?
A fallen star? Hard fire from the clouds?
Might it even be a fragment of heaven?
In any case, Chursates took the iron,
what had been his family's good-luck charm,
and carried the ore to the foremost smithy,
and many nails were hammered out of it.
To the best of my knowledge, no human
has ever been hit by a fallen star;
but he might have Katheryne killed by one.
He built, from three layers of wood,
a huge solid disc, fusing the layers
soundly with the lightning-iron nails.
Because this was a vanity project
of his, Chursates took a special care;
he chose the very best ash and elm woods
with the most auspicious wood-grain patterns;
and thought long on the placement of the spikes
and serrated saws that covered the surface

of the wheel. And he socketed a rod
into the central hub so that his servants,
with effort, could set the wheel rotating.

CHURSATES. Now picture two wheels, honoured emperor,
and Katheryne between them, trapped between them,
her tender flesh at all points, from head to foot,
ground down between contrarotating wheels,
turned swiftly by the able hands of my men,
a great spectacle to scare the people,
who will never after wish to enter Heaven
that way.

SCROOBY. And then the master builder ceased,
whom at least one chronicle deemed insanus.

EMPEROR. I command this machine be implemented.
Katheryne shall be put between the Wheels.
No one who sees it will ever forget it,
or fail to speak of it; let her die badly.

SCROOBY. So Chursates wept at his good fortune,
and at the beauty of his invention
which had won the blessing of the emperor,
promising him fame and wealth and power.
But hear now of a more secret meaning
behind all of his effort, and his tears.
When he was a boy he saw the thunder;
at this late date he was controlling it.

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AUGUSTA. Dear girl, it is best that I not stand here
outside your prison door, though it be night
and the guards are asleep. May I come in?
KATHERYNE. Yes, good mother. Come into my home, please.
SCROOBY. The term “mother” was a sign of respect.
AUGUSTA. I can barely see by my candlelight.
Take this; I brought a robe for you to wear.
KATHERYNE. What a lovely piece of embroidery.
Please, get comfortable.
AUGUSTA. How does one do that?
KATHERYNE. Here is some straw. Sit. I will sit by you.
AUGUSTA. You are the good queen Katheryne.
KATHERYNE. I am.
AUGUSTA. You’re just a young girl.
KATHERYNE. I’m eighteen years old.
AUGUSTA. Good lady, how do you do?
KATHERYNE. I feel no pain.
AUGUSTA. I’ve brought you food and drink.
KATHERYNE. Thank you, mother,
but I am preparing my soul, by fasting.
AUGUSTA. You have wounds.
KATHERYNE. They whipped me.
AUGUSTA. I am sorry.
Distinguished queen of Alexandria,
they build what they call a Katheryne Wheel,
a device to cause your body many pains.
See me weep for sorrow. You will not live!
KATHERYNE. Why should I fear death? For at that moment
I shall join the holy saints in Heaven.
So I thank the emperor for his hatred,

for he is giving me a divine strength.

AUGUSTA. The love in my heart has withdrawn from him.

He is too full of cruelty.

KATHERYNE. What is your name?

AUGUSTA. I shall remove this shawl from around my head.

See? I am Augusta, empress of Rome.

KATHERYNE. Good mother Augusta, why have you come to me?

AUGUSTA. I wanted to see you, and hear you speak.

But getting in here was no easy thing.

I swore my husband's aide to secrecy;

Then this same man, Porphyro, had to bribe

the two hundred prison guards on duty.

What a miracle you still have your wit,

for all of the vexations you're facing.

Your strength is an astonishment to me.

KATHERYNE. All entering the kingdom of Heaven

have to pass through tribulation to do so.

Then I shall be given great rewards.

AUGUSTA. What rewards?

KATHERYNE. Endless life.

AUGUSTA. Endless life?

KATHERYNE. And more pleasures

than a person can mention with their mouth,

and tell with tongue, though they speak forever.

AUGUSTA. What did you say aloud about our gods?

KATHERYNE. That it's madness to give honour to things

that are soulless and lifeless, and provide

no benefit to any worshiper.

Understand that there are not many gods,

but one god; and with one bolt of lightning

my god shall destroy the Katheryne wheel;

and all who gather for the spectacle
shall see this, and learn who is their master.
He shall take open vengeance on them all.
AUGUSTA. Bring me into the mystery of what you know.
KATHERYNE. I can bring understanding to your heart.
Then you will no longer live in madness.
You wil be so strong you'll dread no devil.
All your neighbours shall envy not your wealth,
but the peace inside you. While they weep,
you will say, "It is full merry in Heaven."
SCROOBY. Katheryne preached the joys of Paradise,
and spoke so well, she converted Augusta
to the faith.
AUGUSTA. Ah, I am blessed, to be given
such a gift! Katheryne, my desire
is fulfilled! I have delighted in your voice!
KATHERYNE. Do you feel the power dwelling in your heart?
Continue evermore in good courage.
SCROOBY. When Augusta bid farewell to Katheryne,
she left there at midnight. She was led away
by trusty Porphyro, and she spoke to him.
AUGUSTA. Porphyro, have you read yet the Scripture
of the Christians?
PORPHYRO. Never. My mind has been
occupied, since I was a child, with war.
I've never turned my attention elsewhere.
SCROOBY. So the empress spoke to him of what
she had learned from Katheryne about Cryst.
And Porphyro filled with joy, and cast off
his senseless law, and turned to the one faith,
and believed in Cryst. And soon after that,

the two hundred guards believed in Cryst, too.

Now everywhere you went in Alexandria

you heard them say, “It is full merry in Heaven.”

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SCROOBY. “What just happened?” the emperor spoke out.

“A bolt of lightning just blew up your device,”

said the empress, suppressing a smile.

Then all who looked into the smoke—saw things.

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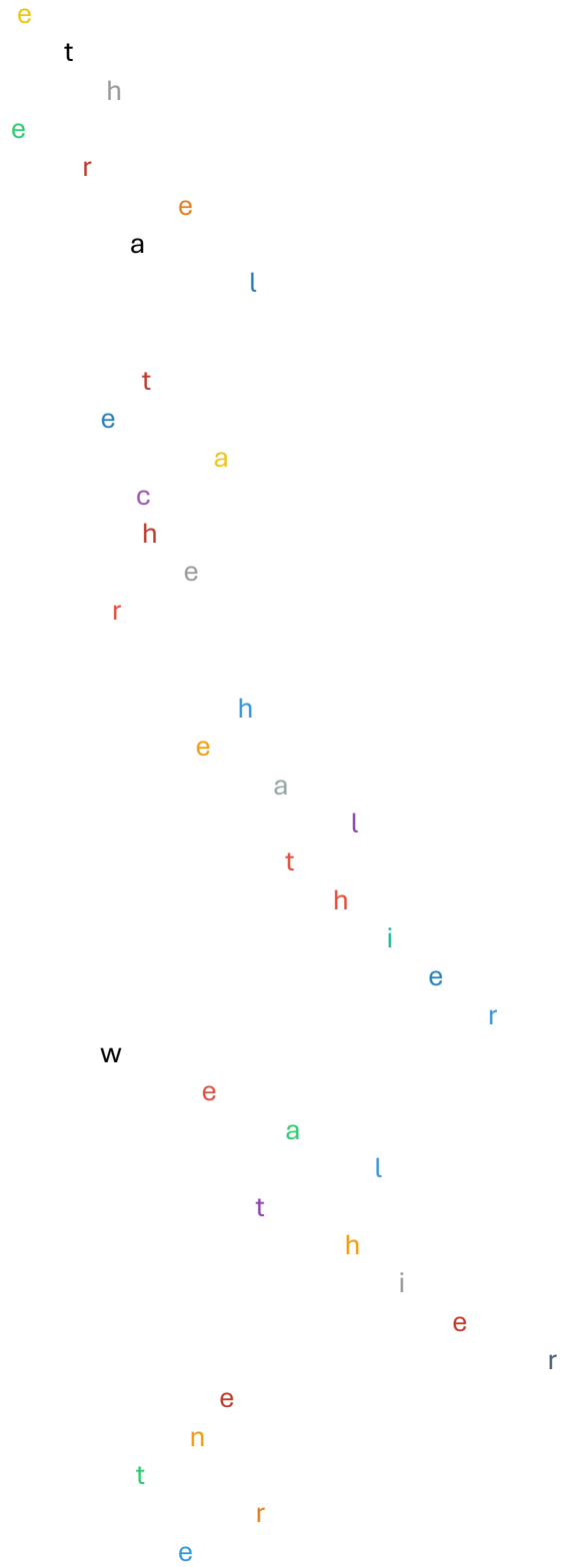

KATHERYNE. Obey me, or suffer his punishment.

EMPEROR. Katheryne, you shall suffer my punishment.

KATHERYNE. Do as your mind pleases. Don’t be afraid.

PEOPLE. Great is the God of the Christians!

EMPEROR. What's that?

AUGUSTA. This martyr's god will not let you touch her.

MESSENGER. The bolt has killed four thousand of your men!

EMPEROR. Who are those among the people who laugh?

AUGUSTA. You are a laughingstock to the people.

I have spoken to the good Katheryne!

EMPEROR. How have you spoken to the prisoner?

AUGUSTA. I have. I shall be rewarded for it!

PEOPLE. *Cryst is god, Cryst is our god, who was stretched*

out on the tree, who died, who was taken

into his grave, but who lives still in Heaven.

EMPEROR. Guards! Remove the empress from me. Take her

outside the city walls. Remove her breasts

with hot iron forks, and do it slowly.

Then cut off her head with the sword.

AUGUSTA. Ah, me!

Pray for me, Katheryne!

KATHERYNE. Go in peace, woman.

You will feel great comfort after your death.

SCROOBY. So on the twenty-third of November,

the empress was murdered outside of town.

Then Maxentius discovered how she

met with the prisoner, and Porphyro,

too, was condemned to death.

PORPHYRO. Yes, I am Christian;

and I have standing with me an army of God.

SCROOBY. Those two hundred guards? Condemned to death, too.

And Catherine comforted them. And they died.

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KATHERYNE. Emperor, please come in.

EMPEROR. Thank you, Katheryne.

It is hard going with only my candle.

KATHERYNE. Let me help you to this litter of straw;

here you can sit and be comfortable.

EMPEROR. You will sit here beside me?

KATHERYNE. Yes, I will.

Have you come here to kill me?

EMPEROR. No, I haven't.

I hope to save your life, good Katheryne.

You're just a girl, and I'll see you as such.

You will grow up with me in my palace

by my side, beside the high golden throne.

You will be respected by everyone;

everyone will want to know what you say,

and will listen. You will live in comfort

all of your days, among friends and subjects;

a girl couldn't wish for a better life.

All you must do is stop talking of God.

SCROOBY. And so it happened that the emperor

had no choice but to cut the girl's head off.

It's said, in ancient Greek, that when her head

was severed it was milk that came pouring

out of the wound, later to heal people

with its holy properties. The angels

lifted her body and brought it to Sinai

to protect her bones, which were later found.

It's all over; I've nothing left to say.

[end]

[by Scrooby]

[02 – 24 February 2025]